

altogether without cause, and is a natural reaction against a refinement of classification, as regards genera, which in this country has been carried quite too far, and against which there is also a reaction among experts themselves. What you hope to see, I may venture to say, will be to a large degree realized in the next Check List of North American birds — the A. O. U. List. It will necessarily be some time — perhaps a year or more — before it will be in the hands of the public; but it is an open secret that it will present, for one thing, a very great reduction in the number of generic names — a return in this respect to almost the Audubonian basis.

But there is perhaps another thing which you overlook, and that is that while many of the genera in our North American list have but one or two species referred to them, they may be genera which have elsewhere many species, and that in a list of the birds of the world, instead of having one or two species, as is the case with *Merula*, *Saxicola*, *Mimus*, *Thryothorus*, *Myiadestes*, *Euphonia*, *Spermophila*, etc., they really include a dozen, or twenty, or even more.

Now, in regard to your paper sent for publication in 'The Auk.' From the standpoint of the scientist the scheme unfolded is in many ways so antagonistic to settled canons of nomenclature as to be thoroughly impracticable. This is a frank statement of the case, dictated by the most friendly motives. While I do not decline your article, as a friend I would advise its withdrawal, for reasons above stated. If you prefer to see it published, its proper place would be in the department of 'Correspondence,' and its character would call for editorial comment. About what that would be you can infer from the tenor of this letter.... I now leave the matter in this way, and hope to hear from you soon in reply.

Very truly yours,

J. A. ALLEN.

A Lay View of 'Ornithophilologicalities.'

TO THE EDITORS OF THE AUK:—

Sirs: While reading the various articles which relate to the nomenclature of birds, by Professor Merriam and Drs. Stejneger and Coues, which have appeared in 'The Auk' and its predecessor, the lay mind is filled with dismay. The predominant feeling is that if these literary amenities are essential to the science, we must forego the science. One cannot help thinking that a fitting caption for such papers as the dreary 'Ornithophilologicalities' would have been that which Dante found above the entrance to a less desolate region: "All hope abandon ye who enter here." Where opinions are so radically opposed what gains can be expected? Has all the controversy hitherto been able to accomplish anything? Do we not find even in so small a matter as the broad distinction between birds hatched naked and those hatched with a covering that Dr. Coues says 'psilopædic' and 'ptilopædic' in place of the 'gymnopædic' and 'dasypædic' of other authors? And is it not certain that each author is prepared to maintain that his particular word is the more pre-

ferable, even at the cost of obscuring the very pith and marrow of our beloved science?

I am prepared to applaud the energy, the untiring devotion, and the incomprehensible learning of the philologically inclined gentlemen, but I am prompted to ask whether we may not reasonably expect a deliverance from such discussions. I am quite aware that I shall be told that no compulsion is exercised in the matter, and that I need not afflict myself from a sense of duty. But this does not cover the case; I am, it is true, merely one of the most inconspicuous readers of 'The Auk,' but I know of some, at least, who believe as I do, that 'The Auk' would gain strength by excluding such arid matter as it has lately printed for the learned Doctors previously mentioned. If it is said that these articles properly belong in the pages of the 'American Ibis,' and it be so decided by a majority of my fellow readers, I shall endeavor to submit as gracefully as may be.

If you will allow me a word further, I shall beg to point out what seems to me a growing evil in ornithological writings of the present time. The tendency begotten of this precise controversial spirit, is to lose sight of the main object in pursuing the barren details. One who examines a landscape with a field-glass may be able to tell you that a man in a blue flannel shirt is rubbing down the farmer's horse in that distant farmyard, but, if fascinated by the power of the glass, he continues his examinations till the waning of the day, what is his knowledge of the details worth, compared to your own appreciation of the whole?

Now it appears to me that this is just what too many of our recent writers are doing. When a man pores over the distorted skin of what was once a bird, eventually asserting that the "hallux is slightly longer than the first phalanx of the middle toe," he has stated what may be a very valuable fact in analysis. But let him beware lest, in his solicitude for the minute, he totally unfit himself for a true appreciation of the whole.

An excessive familiarity with proper scientific terms is the bane of many otherwise pleasing writers; whoever wrote of the Woodcock, "Its eye is remarkably large and handsome, but unfit to bear the glare of the sun, its full and almost *amaurotic* appearance plainly suggesting the *crepuscular* habits of the bird,"* is clearly a victim to pedantry. Not one of the later writers can compare with Audubon or Nuttall in the use of English, and more especially in a certain feeling for nature, a love of the natural for its own sweet sake, unless, indeed, I except John Burroughs. Is it then impossible that accuracy and grace shall go hand in hand? Assuredly there are shining examples to the contrary; where, for instance, in contemporary writing can we find a parallel to the passage in which Audubon tells of his joy at discovering the American Avocet upon its breeding ground? He places before us the whole scene, and describes in graphic terms and simple English, the appearance, the evolutions, and the surroundings of the birds. In short, he wrote with a spirit so loving that one cannot but admire. The science of ornithology has made

* *Vide* The Water Birds of North America, Vol. I, p. 184 (Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1884).

wonderful strides since 'The Birds of America' appeared, and it may be argued, when the data are so full, and so many facts, then unknown, now require mention, that space forbids attention to the spiritual side of the charming study. If so, I shall claim that the admission proves my previous point, and that in spite of our advanced knowledge, our trinomials, our excessive subdivision, our flutterings from one name to its older synonym, and all the other abominations which the learning of our writers has forced upon them, they illustrate a decline in their art, and must bestir themselves to shake off the dust of museums and to draw fresh inspiration from a humbler devotion to nature, for herself.

Very respectfully,

The Acorns, Peace Dale, R. I.,

R. G. HAZARD, 2D.

May 27, 1884.

[Our correspondent, we fear, fails to distinguish clearly between the *science* of ornithology and the *sentiment* of ornithology — both legitimate in their way, and not necessarily antagonistic, though not always compatible. The love of the beautiful for its own sake is praiseworthy, and to lose sight of the spiritual in nature is to miss some of the highest pleasures of which our lives are susceptible. The graceful forms of birds, their exquisite tints, the melody of their songs, the beautiful economy of their lives, appeal to our senses with a power not easy to resist, much less to ignore. Every true naturalist shares their enjoyment, as well as the school-boy, the poet, and the field-naturalist, whose real knowledge of the structure of birds, their relations to each other, to their environment, and to nature in the broader sense, rarely passes beyond the stage of admiration and enjoyment, which will ever vary in intensity with the temperament of the individual. The 'closet' or 'museum' naturalist begins his studies as an enthusiastic lover of nature — is inspired by this love to seek out her mysteries — but whose devotion to the minutiae of the problems presented blunts, perchance, his appreciation of the poetic and the sentimental. His pleasure in the objects of his study is not less than before, but is different in kind. His enthusiasm has found a new channel; his pleasure is that of discovery superimposed upon admiration and sentiment. The dry details of anatomical structure — external and internal — are pregnant with meaning, which the non-investigating 'lay' mind fails to see, or, if seeing, to interpret and appreciate. Such fundamental questions as the origin of life, the differentiation of its forms, the evolution of species, and their inter-relationships, interest him less than the peculiarities of habits or song a given species may present.

To do any piece of work we must have tools, and must also know how to use them. To mention objects, or their parts, we must have names for them, and in most cases the names have to be provided. The usual lay vocabulary is insufficient, and names must be invented, both for the objects and, to a large extent, for the parts, even if the object be merely a bird. The lay mind takes no note of the minuter structures and, therefore, has for them no désignations. Yet they are the elements the scientific mind has most largely to deal with, and which afford the key to many

a difficult problem. As names must be invented, it matters little whether they be derived from the vernacular or a classical language, as in either case they would be new and unfamiliar and would have to be learned. In point of fact, however, the vernacular tongue is a poor mint for the coining of the needed terms, and recourse is naturally had to the classical languages—the languages, for many reasons, *par excellence* those of science—whose resources more readily meet the emergency. As regards the names of species of animals or plants, but a small proportion are ever recognized in any vernacular tongue, because unknown to the average layman. When discovered and made known by science, a vernacular name is often invented for them, as well as a scientific one. Yet many of the most remarkable and familiarly known animals and plants never acquire a name other than the scientific one, compounded of Latin or Greek, which the laity adopt in common with scientists, and never even dream that they are using the technical language of science. Hippopotamus, rhinoceros, and the names of many of our ornamental plants are cases in point. The scientist easily acquires familiarity with the terms of his science, even in cases where there are vernacular equivalents, and from habit of thought almost unconsciously introduces them into his conversation or writings—often, we must say, unadvisedly and perhaps indefensibly.

Now it happens—in many cases most unfortunately—that the same animal, or the same organ, or the same condition of structure, may have several names,—just as in our own vernacular we have several names for the same thing, or the same bird, or, still worse, the same name for different things, as is again unfortunately sometimes the case in scientific terminology. But in case of the latter—as we have not in the other—we have rules for determining which is the correct and proper term to be used, especially as regards the names of animals and plants, and also for the proper construction of these names. But as regards the construction of names all writers are not equally skillful, and hence the desire on the part of the philologically skillful to correct such names as have not been correctly formed. But so great has the evil of emendation itself become, that the tendency is now toward the acceptance of names as originally formed, unless they display an error of an obviously or known typographical character. So that this part of the evil is likely to eventually cure itself.

It has happened that naturalists have, unwittingly, repeatedly described and named animals that had been named before; also the same animals have been named nearly simultaneously by naturalists of different countries. As the same species can have only one name, and as the same name cannot be used for different animals (to speak, for the sake of brevity, in general terms) without creating great confusion and uncertainty in regard to what is meant, it is necessary to have a rule by which to determine which name shall so be used. This rule is *the rule of priority*, adopted by naturalists the world over.

This rule provides that the name first given to a genus or species shall be the name to which it is entitled, and by which alone it should be known, subject to the single condition that it had not been used for

another genus in the same kingdom, in the case of a generic name, or to another species in the same genus, in the case of a specific name. But a name may have gained a currency to which it is not entitled, in consequence of an earlier name having been overlooked, owing to obscurity of publication or other causes. As fixity of names is the prime desideratum in our nomenclature, we must not only have fixed rules for determining the tenability of names, but must adhere to them inflexibly, otherwise the shuffling of names would never cease.

Just at the present time 'The Auk' is bristling with these technicalities of nomenclature, which so naturally disgust the lay mind. And why? Simply because the 'closet' or 'museum' ornithologists of this country wish to settle at once, and if possible forever, as regards North American birds, these vexed questions of synonymy, in view of the proposed new A. O. U. List of North American Birds. The end in view is not the upsetting of names for the mere sake of upsetting them, or for any personal ends or ambitions, but simply and purely to secure a stable foundation for the future. We are simply repairing our tools and setting in order the great North American ornithological household.

We are quite aware that a considerable number of our readers share the 'lay view' of the case, as presented by our correspondent, and we even sympathise with them in their disgust, but beg to assure them that it is just such discussions of abstract and dry details of nomenclature that advance, in a certain necessary way, the *science* of ornithology; although nomenclature is not in itself science, but merely one of the indispensable tools of science.—J. A. A.]

NOTES AND NEWS.

SOME weeks since we received Heft I of the new quarterly journal of ornithology—'Zeitschrift für die gesammte Ornithologie'—published at Budapest, and edited by Dr. Julius von Madarász. It is large octavo in form, and the present number consists of 74 pages and two colored plates. The articles are mainly written in German, but there are also several papers in Hungarian and one in English. The matter relates mainly to Hungarian ornithology, but contains a paper of eight pages by Dr. L. Stejneger on the Wrens of the subgenus *Anorthura*, which we shall notice more fully later. Dr. E. F. von Homeyer, in a short opening article, proposes to cut the 'gordian knot' of nomenclature by the general adoption of a rule providing that specific names which have been in general use for a considerable period—say twenty years—shall not be subject to alteration; but we fear the practical difficulties of such a scheme have not been carefully weighed by the suggester of this supposed easy way out of the difficulty.